

**Speech by U.S. Interests Section Chief of Mission Michael Parmly  
Marking the 57<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the UN General Assembly's  
Adoption and Proclamation of  
The Universal Declaration of Human Rights**

Fifty-seven years ago today, the United Nations' General Assembly adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Representatives of eight countries spent two years drafting and negotiating a common standard of human rights observance for all peoples of the world. Cuba was among the countries voting in favor. The Universal Declaration thus became the world's condemnation of dictatorship, tyranny, and the barbarous crimes they had inflicted upon mankind, and a clarion call for humanity to be free.

This year also marks the 60th anniversary of another of the world's responses to the human rights crimes of World War II, the start of the Nuremberg trials. That great milestone laid down a marker for government functionaries everywhere. "I was just following orders" would no longer excuse anyone's participation in human rights crimes. Citizens would hold their governments accountable for their actions. Since then, countries emerging from nightmarish, dictatorial governments have dealt in different ways with their own government functionaries involved in human rights crimes. But one common characteristic is clear: When they secure democratic rule, free citizens invariably focus the bright light of public scrutiny on those who perpetrated evil deeds on fellow human beings. Cuba will be no exception.

The U.N. Universal Declaration was written after the horrors of fascism were exposed, but there were many who still held rosy illusions about communism. By the early 1990's, the material failure and moral bankruptcy of communism were equally clear. Eastern Europe has cast off communism and embraced freedom. More recently, pro-democracy champions successfully blocked those trying to subvert the transition to democratic rule in Ukraine and Georgia. The people of Lebanon are now staking their claim to democracy. Despite the most challenging conditions, Afghans have twice turned out to vote in numbers that have surprised even the few optimistic foreign observers. Undeterred by terrorists, Iraqis approved their new constitution enshrining democratic ideals and human rights by a two-thirds margin.

When given the chance, people all over the world have eagerly embraced democracy. Democracy is not a perfect end-state, but rather a work in progress. Each democracy is unique. "America will not impose our own style of government," said President Bush, "... Our goal instead is to help others find their own voice, attain their own freedom, and make their own way." There is no justice without freedom, and there can be no human rights without human liberty.

Sadly, Cuba has been left behind in the global march toward democracy and greater respect for human rights. The Cuban regime does not represent the people, nor does it have any interest in bettering their lives. Rather, the regime is obsessed with self-preservation. It maintains itself by isolating Cubans from the rest of the world, keeping Cubans artificially poor and dependent on a State that demands unquestioned compliance, and instilling fear

among those who question the regime's lies. It is through the abuse of universally recognized human rights that the Cuban regime is able to cling to power.

The Cuban regime wouldn't so repress its own citizens unless it was deeply afraid of them. It denies them the right stipulated in Article 21 of the Universal Declaration to "... take part in the government of one's country, directly or through freely chosen representatives." Cubans, I know you fear your government, but it fears you far more. It worries that some day you will force it to respect Article 21, and have a voice in how you are governed.

The regime keeps you artificially poor because it's easier to maintain control of people who are too preoccupied with scrounging to meet daily necessities to think about politics. Consider this: the two million Cubans outside of Cuba have more wealth than do the 11.2 million Cubans in Cuba. That didn't happen by chance. Your masters stripped away your ability to achieve financial independence so that they could better control you.

The Cuban regime's hurling of angry and often violent groups against pro-democratic dissidents is particularly disgusting. The regime would like for us to think that these so-called "actos de repudios" in front of the homes of dissidents are spontaneous. We all know that most neighbors refuse to participate in such vile abuse. Instead, the regime resorts to bussing in its modern-day equivalent of Nazi "Brown shirts" or Ku Klux Klan members to do its dirty work. Recently the mobs have taken to calling for their victims' execution with shouts of "Pared on!" It is outrageous that the Cuban regime targets its own people in such a way; Cubans everywhere should be appalled and ashamed. Today we call on the whole world to reject and denounce these intolerable crimes.

The regime goes to obsessive lengths to ensure that its propaganda is the only information Cubans receive about the outside world. But does the world really understand the extent to which the regime punishes those who dare to expose its lies? One out of every five imprisoned journalists in the world is in Cuba. Reporters Without Borders recently ranked 164 countries' respect for press freedom; Cuba was ranked second to last, ahead only of North Korea.

In Cuba today, there are more than 300 political prisoners. Valiant, principled individuals such as Dr. Oscar Biscet find themselves jailed for daring to call for democratic elections and respect for human rights. For most of us, it is hard to imagine what it's like for those who are incarcerated in cells so small they can barely lie down. Cells with walls purposely sprayed with fouled water so as to give prisoners skin infections. And under such humiliating conditions to hear day-in and day-out that you are unfit for society, and that you are utterly alone. To them we assert: You are not alone; you are not forgotten. We honor your bravery and your principles.

Marking those who dissent as outcasts, and making them feel alone, is a hallmark of totalitarian regimes. A totalitarian state seeks to render the will of the individual meaningless. The individual's rights are abused with the aim of bending him or her to the will of the leadership. Once most resistance has been crushed, the leadership seeks to use what it hopes

are the quiescent masses as an instrument to execute its projects. These projects are almost never in the people's interest, and are usually extremely harmful to them and their neighbors.

Totalitarian states have taken many guises: communism, socialism, Nazism, fascism, and sometimes theocracy. They have all maintained control by abusing the rights of the individual. That is the telltale sin they cannot hide. They have tried to justify their abuses by extolling the alleged virtues of whichever ideology they espouse. Around the world, people have rejected the proposition that the alleged benefits of a given totalitarian ideology outweigh the benefits of government respect for human rights. The Cuban people reached that same conclusion long ago. They are making their voices heard.

The rights outlined in the U.N. Universal Declaration are so fundamental and so intrinsic to humankind that they have become the standard for the whole world. Yet the Cuban regime won't allow the Declaration to be published or distributed. What is it afraid of?

- Perhaps it is the Declaration's assertion that "Everyone has the right to freedom of thought and expression; this right includes the freedom to hold opinions ... and impart information and ideas through any media." People go to jail in Cuba for exercising that universal right.
- Perhaps it is the Declaration's call for each person to be treated equally before the law, and to be allowed a fair trial. But guilt or innocence in Cuba is often pre-determined by one's political views.
- Perhaps it is the Declaration's affirmation that each person has a right to leave any country, including his home country. That right is regularly denied in Cuba.
- Perhaps it is the Declaration's statement that no one shall be arbitrarily deprived of his property. Yet the regime routinely strips all material possessions and homes from those it authorizes to emigrate.

Some of the regime's apologists try to excuse its denial of basic human freedoms by pointing to the so-called "achievements of the revolution." Let's consider these.

- It is true that Cuba has a high literacy rate, but it was already high in 1958. More importantly, did the citizens of Cuba have to sacrifice freedom of the press - and to forfeit in the process their right to express political views - to raise the island's literacy rate?
- It is true that all education is free in Cuba, but why did it have to be at loss of personal freedoms? Did Cuban university students have to sacrifice their ability to choose their course of study? Why should the ability to parrot the State's political propaganda determine educational opportunities?
- It is true that Cuba offers free medical care. But where is the revolution's touted equity if the best medical care is reserved for foreigners and the minority of Cubans with access to hard currency?
- It is true that housing for Cubans is inexpensive. But looking closely at the appalling condition of Havana's residential buildings, with their overcrowding and dangerously decaying infrastructure, leads one to conclude that the revolution has caused chronic housing problems.
- It is true that women's participation in the workforce has significantly increased. But Cuban women are also condemned to receiving artificially low salaries so that the State can

wring out financial resources to fund its prestige projects benefiting non-Cubans. Don't be fooled. The regime's "achievements" are no substitute for respect for universal human rights.

The regime's human rights abuses are so notorious that year after year, the world community has condemned Cuba at the U.N. Human Rights Commission in Geneva. A Special Rapporteur has been named, and continues to wait for the day the regime will heed the world's call, and allow her in to investigate the abuses that sadly have become routine.

International Human Rights Day in Cuba is a somber occasion. At the same time, there are glimmering points of light shining through the darkness.

One of the brightest ones is the "Damas de Blanco," the magnificent women who honor their heroic family members who were imprisoned because they supported democratic change. Most of their imprisoned loved ones are among the 75 brave dissidents jailed in March and April of 2003. This month they'll receive the European Union's Sakharov Prize, and received two other prestigious honors this year, the Spanish Pedro Luis Boitel Award, and the Fundacion Hispano-Cubano Prize. Please join me now in recognizing the "Damas de Blanco."

Another positive human rights development was the wonderful May 20 commemoration of Cuban independence. Defying the regime, over 100 members of the Assembly to Promote Civil Society came together to chart a course toward a democratic future for Cuba. Marta Beatriz, thank you for your courageous leadership.

Nothing so startled the regime as Oswaldo Paya's landmark Varela Project. Cuba's own constitution said that legislative proposals backed by at least 10,000 citizens could be presented directly to the legislature, so Mr. Paya set about gathering signatures supporting an opening of the political system. Nearly 40,000 people have since signed; of course, the regime ignored the petition. Oswaldo, thank you for your inspired leadership.

Like other leading dissidents, Vladimiro Roca knows the evils of Cuba's totalitarian system from the inside. His "Todos Unidos" organization welcomes all Cubans who want to be free, and is respected around the world. His 36-point plan for economic, social, and political reform will help map Cuba's road to a democratic future. Vladimiro, you are an example for others to follow.

Thirsty for knowledge of the outside world, more and more Cubans are tuning in to Miami television stations, Radio Marti and to other foreign radio stations. In many cases, information on what is really happening in Cuba comes from dissident journalists -- such as Jorge Olivera, Miriam Leiva, and Oscar Epinosa Chepe -- who report on the abuses that they see. We salute these brave, independent journalists.

Independent librarians are also helping to provide Cubans access to information about the outside world. In most places, you don't have to be brave to maintain a collection of books; in Cuba it is a prerequisite. Independent librarians are frequently detained and jailed. Roberto de Miranda knows well the risks that this difficult work entails. Police have repeatedly

searched his home, and he and his family have been the victims of "actos de repudio." Nonetheless, public school teachers continue to send their students to his library because they value the educational resources he offers. Today we salute Cuba's brave independent librarians.

In hard times people have always turned to God, and the Cuban people are no different. My conversations with Cubans lead me to believe that for many their religious faith is what sustains them. Many of this country's clergy and religious leaders have been the victims of unconscionable persecution, but have nonetheless persevered in holding out hope to their people, in guiding them on the paths of goodness. Please join with me now in recognizing them.

All Cubans should heed Pope John Paul II's message, "Be not afraid." Think for yourselves. As some brave dissidents say, "take the policeman: out of your heads." "It's not easy" seems to be the national motto. Instead, I'd suggest it be "let's make a better future." The future will be better, but it's going to require individual effort. Each person will have a part to play. Get ready now to play yours.

Cuba's future will be determined by Cubans. Our role is to support those working for democratic change. You will set the course your country takes; we'll help you implement your vision - if you want us to.

Fifty-seven years ago today, the world chose a new, better direction, with respect for individual rights as its guidepost. Cuba's regime has turned its back on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights for over four decades. However, Cuba cannot resist the global tide of change forever. Cubans know change is coming, and the majority fervently hopes that a democratic transformation will come soon. And when democracy triumphs in Cuba, the United States, Europe, Latin America, and other champions of freedom will be there to welcome it.

Thank you.